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Nesiophasma richi sp. nov., a new massive stick insect species from the island of Biak, Indonesia (Insecta: Phasmatodea)

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description;
new species;
keys;
Wallacea;
Indonesia.

Abstract. – The new stick insect species *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. is herein described from Biak Island, Papua Province, Indonesia. This discovery represents the first known occurrence of the genus east of both Weber's and Lydekker's lines of faunal balance, expanding the known range of *Nesiophasma* into the Papuan biogeographic region. The new species is diagnosed based on external morphology, with detailed illustrations and a key to congeners is provided. Despite the often large body size of *Nesiophasma* species, they remain infrequently encountered in the field, likely due to cryptic behavior/camouflage and under-sampling across their range. This new record contributes to the growing evidence of overlooked phasmatodean diversity in the Indo-Australian Archipelago and highlights the need for further entomological exploration of offshore Papuan islands.

Daawia, Warikar E.L., Yando H., Suhartawan B., Foley E.M. & Cumming R.T., 2025. – *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**., a new massive stick insect species from the island of Biak, Indonesia (Insecta: Phasmatodea). *Faunitaxys*, 13(44) : 1 – 8.

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Introduction

The genus *Nesiophasma* Günther, 1934 (Phasmatodea: Phasmatidae: Platycraninae: Stephanacridini) comprises a lineage of large, apterous stick insects (Fig. 1) distributed throughout the central Indo-Australian Archipelago, almost exclusively within Wallacea (Fig. 2). Members of the genus are morphologically distinguished by their robust habitus, rugose or granulose integument, and armed femora, often bearing prominent spines. Despite their conspicuous morphology, *Nesiophasma* species have historically been taxonomically neglected, with most species described prior to the mid-20th century and remaining poorly understood until the recent comprehensive revision by Hennemann (2021), which redefined the genus and added two new species. Subsequent studies have further expanded the genus with two additional species (Hennemann et al., 2023; Hennemann et al., 2025). To date, all described species of *Nesiophasma* have been recorded from islands west of Weber's Line of faunal balance, including Sulawesi, the Sula Islands, and the Lesser Sundas (Hennemann, 2021). Herein, we describe a new species from Biak Island, an island situated north of the New Guinea mainland and east of both Weber's and Lydekker's lines of faunal balance (Lohman et al., 2011; Mcguire et al., 2023). This represents the first confirmed record of the genus from the Papuan region and provides new data on the biogeographical range and dispersal history of *Nesiophasma*.

Material and methods

The holotype specimen herein described was collected in 2007 on Biak Island by the first author, with appropriate collecting permits issued by Cenderawasih University, Jayapura, Indonesia. Other species were reviewed via the high-quality images of captive reared specimens as well as many type material images available publicly online (www.phasmatodea.com, www.phasmida.speciesfile.org) in

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Fig. **1**. Holotype female *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. in situ on Biak Island in July 2007. Photographs by the first author. **A**. Ventral habitus. **B**. Lateral habitus, perched on a branch, highlighting the impressive size and camouflage.

order to better understand intraspecific variability presented within congenerics. The colouration is described from photographs of the living holotype (Fig. 1) and from images taken of the holotype specimen after being preserved. Measurements were taken using a long ruler or digital callipers, and are given to 1.0 mm. Photographs of the dried holotype specimen were taken by Rob de Vos (Netherlands) using a Nikon D5600 camera equipped with a Nikon 105 mm macro lens and a Meike flashgun FC100 LED ring flash. Adobe Photoshop Elements 13 (Adobe Inc., San Jose, USA) was used as post-processing software. The distribution map (Fig. 2) was produced with SimpleMappr (Shorthouse, 2010).

Taxonomy

Phasmatidae, Platycraninae, Stephanacridini

Nesiophasma Günther, 1934

Type species. – *Nesiophasma spinulosum* (Brunner von Wattenwyl, 1907).

Remarks. – Most *Nesiophasma* species were described about a century ago, until Hennemann (2021) thoroughly reviewed the genus and described two additional species. Since that review, two additional species have been described (Hennemann et al., 2023; Hennemann et al., 2025). Most *Nesiophasma* species are distributed throughout Wallacea west of Weber's line of faunal balance, except for the herein described species which is recorded from Biak Island, east of both the Weber line of faunal balance and the Lydekker line of faunal balance (Fig. 2). Surprisingly, despite the massive size of many *Nesiophasma* species, they are often rarely encountered in the wild (Fig. 1).

Distribution (Fig. 2). – Most species are found within the bounds of Wallacea, west of Weber's Line of faunal balance: Sulawesi, Peleng Island, Selayar Island, Kalaotoa Island, Sanana Island, Romang Island, Timor Island, Sumba Island, Sangihe Island and Talaud Islands. Only the herein described new species is found east of both the Weber line and the Lydekker line of faunal balance on Biak Island off the north coast of Western New Guinea, Indonesia.

Nesiophasma species

1. ***Nesiophasma davisdamaledoi*** Hennemann, Damastra, Le Tirant, & Suputa, 2025. Distribution: Sumba Island.

2. ***Nesiophasma giganteum*** Hennemann, Le Tirant & Purwanto, 2021. Distribution: Banggai Islands (Peleng).

3. ***Nesiophasma kuehni*** (Brunner v. Wattenwyl, 1907). Distribution: Romang Island.

4. ***Nesiophasma oligarches*** (Günther, 1935). Distribution: S-Sulawesi.

5. ***Nesiophasma plateni*** (Dohrn, 1910). Distribution: Sangihe Islands & Talaud Islands.

6. ***Nesiophasma richi*** **sp**. **nov**. Distribution: Biak Island.

7. ***Nesiophasma sananaense*** Hennemann, 2021. Distribution: Sula Islands.

8. ***Nesiophasma sobesonbaii*** Hennemann, Damastra, Damaledo, Cumming & Le Tirant, 2023. Distribution: Timor Island.

9. ***Nesiophasma spinulosum*** (Brunner v. Wattenwyl, 1907). Distribution: Pulau Selayar & Pulau Kalaotoa.

10. ***Nesiophasma turbans*** (Brunner v. Wattenwyl, 1907). Distribution: Sulawesi.

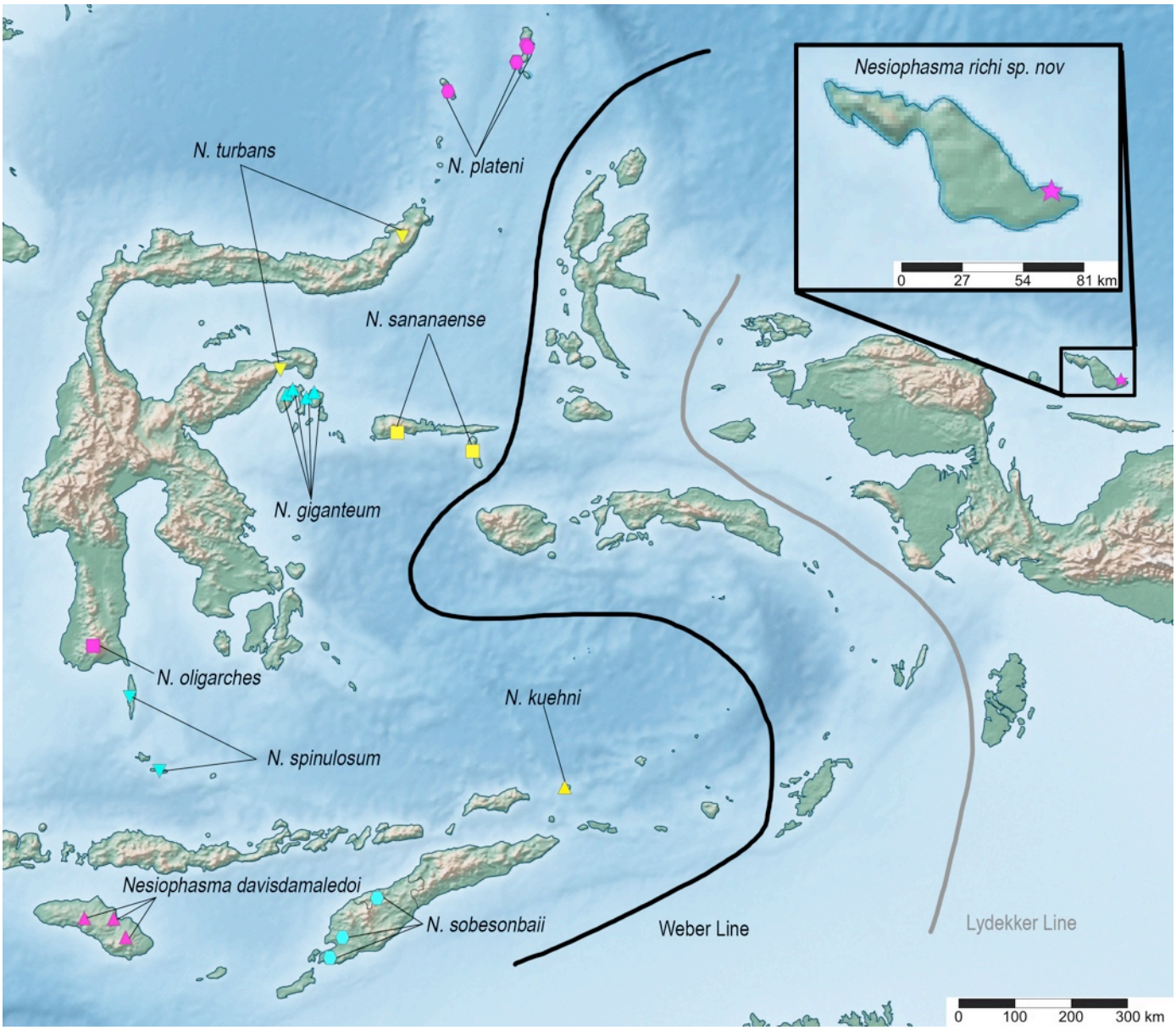

Fig. **2**. Distribution map of currently described *Nesiophasma* Günther, 1934 species. Inset upper right is a closeup of Biak Island, marking the type locality of the herein described *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. Approximations of Weber's (in black) and Lydekker's (in grey) lines of faunal balance are illustrated.

***Nesiophasma richi* sp**. **nov**.

ZooBank : https://zoobank.org/14677D29-CBB5-47EF-AB42-3E907F1A0F45

Holotype, ♀, Holotype, ♀, INDONESIA: Biak Island, Kampung Sauri; 19-VII-2007. Collector: Daawia. Tissue sample: KSP68589. (Verbatim=tgl. 19 juli 07, lokasi=Hutan Sekunder, Kampung Sauri, Tumbuhan Inang: Araliaceae, Kolektor: Daawia).

Differentiation. – At present only the female *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. is known (Fig. 3). The female of this species is morphologically most similar to *Nesiophasma plateni* due to the long, slender body and the exceptionally long subgenital plate coupled with short gonapophysis VIII not visible from under the posterior margin (Fig. 4). These two species can be distinguished by an overall slight size difference as the body length of *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. is 297.0 mm versus *Nesiophasma plateni* with body lengths ranging from 258.0-289.0 mm (Hennemann, 2021). Additionally, the meso- and metatibiae allow differentiation as *Nesiophasma plateni* has distinctly formed, short lobes on the meso- and metatibiae near the femora-tibia joint on the interior surface, versus *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. which lacks lobes on the meso- and metatibiae. Finally, these species can be differentiated by the mesothorax as *Nesiophasma plateni* has the lateral margin unarmored, but in *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. the mesothorax has eleven small nodes along the lateral margin (Fig. 3F).

Etymology. – Patronym. Named in honor of Rich Gittings (USA), a stalwart and long-time friend of the senior author (RTC). Rich is the founder and executive director of North Carolina Legal Services, a nonprofit law firm in Durham, North Carolina, USA, committed to providing affordable and compassionate legal representation to underserved communities. Known for his sharp wit, suggestive jokes, and unflagging dedication to justice, Rich is a beloved figure among friends and colleagues alike. With a body length of 297.0 mm, *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. ranks among the longest insect species known to science—an attribute that seemed especially fitting for someone who has always insisted, with a grin, that size matters. Given the impressive body length and notably elongated genitalia of this species, it seemed only fitting to name it after someone who never misses a chance to turn a scientific observation into a punchline.

Distribution (Fig. 2). – Presently only known from the Island of Biak, from the type locality of Kampung Sauri near the eastern coast.

Key to *Nesiophasma* females

As the herein described species is only known from a female specimen (Fig. 3), only the key to females is revised based upon the recent work of Hennemann et al. (2025). For a key to *Nesiophasma* species males, see Hennemann et al. (2025). Note that females of *Nesiophasma oligarches* and *Nesiophasma turbans* are presently unknown, and are therefore excluded from this key.

1. Abdominal terga II-VI with lateral margins parallel or at most slightly rounded **2**
— Abdominal terga II-VI strongly laterally deflexed and convex; Pulau Romang . . . . . ***kuehni***

2. Gonapophysis VIII short, either not visible from under the margin of the terminal segment or at most only slightly protruding from the posterior margin **3**
— Gonapophysis VIII long and clearly visible, projecting significantly out from the posterior margin of the terminal segment . . . **6**

3. Small (body length incl. subgenital plate < 230.0 mm); median segment at least half as long as metanotum **4**
— Very long species (body length incl. subgenital plate > 250.0 mm); median segment only one-quarter the length of metanotum **5**

4. Large (body length incl. subgenital plate > 180.0 mm); medioventral carina of meso- and metafemora unarmed; lower portion of genae a similar color to the rest of the head; Timor . . . . . ***sobesonbaii***
— Smaller (body length incl. subgenital plate < 170.0 mm); medioventral carina of meso- and metafemora spinose; lower portion of genae black; Sumba . . . . . ***davisdamaledoi***

5. Meso- and metatibiae simple, lacking lobes on the interior surface; mesothorax lateral margin with eleven small nodes spread throughout the length; Biak . . . . . ***richi* sp**. **nov**.
— Distinctly formed, short lobes present on the meso- and metatibiae near the femora-tibia joint on the interior surface; mesothorax unarmoured, smooth; Sangihe & Talaud Islands . . . . . ***plateni***

6. Slender and elongate; mesonotum at least 4.5x longer than wide; basitarsi slender **7**
— Stockier; mesonotum 4x longer than wide and expanded pre-medially; basitarsi with dorsal carinae raised and rounded; Pulau Selayar & Pulau Kalaotoa . . . . . ***spinulosum***

7. Mesonotum 6x longer than wide and slender; antennae reaching to median segment; Pulau Sanana (Sula Islands) . . . . . ***sananaense***
— Mesonotum 4.5x longer than wide and gently swollen pre-medially; antennae reaching to abdominal segment II; Peleng (Banggai Islands) . . . . . ***giganteum***

Description

Female

Coloration. – Coloration based upon photographs of the living holotype (Fig. 1) and the preserved specimen (Fig. 3-5). Overall coloration muddled fawn, tan, and brown, often streaked with these variables colors, creating a striking stick-like coloration (Fig. 1). Head of a similar coloration to the rest of the body, but with slightly lighter colored gena. Subgenital plate ventral surface darker at the base below the terminal abdominal segments, and then a majority of the length is tan (Fig. 4). Profemora with two distinctly pale transverse bands and darker, muddled coloration on the proximal, medial, and distal areas (Fig. 5A). Meso- and metafemora with three distinct pale transverse bands interspersed with darker areas that are more uniform in their coloration than the dark bands on the protibiae (Fig. 5B, C). Tibiae with less distinct bands of color, more muddled. Antennae tan/brown, dark.

Morphology

Head. – Overall ovoid, slightly longer than wide; vertex with slight granulation and several indistinct longitudinal striations; head capsule widest near the compound eyes and narrowing slightly to the posterior (Fig. 3C-E). Compound eyes small, occupying circa ⅓ of the head capsule lateral margins. Antennae long and thin, reaching to the median segment when laid along the dorsal surface. The antennomeres gradually decrease in length from the proximal end to the distal end of the antennae. Scapus approximately rectangular dorsally, vertically compressed, and circa 2x longer than wide. Pedicellus approximately cylindrical and circa 0.75x as long as the scapus.

Thorax. – Pronotum slightly shorter and narrower than the head, roughly rectangular with anterior and posterior margins of similar widths; anterior margin slightly concave and posterior margin slightly convex; lateral margins slightly diverge throughout their length, but not strongly, so the posterior end of the pronotum is only slightly wider than the anterior. On the dorsal surface is a fine longitudinal median furrow present as well as a transverse median sulcus positioned slightly anterior to the midlength. Mesothorax circa 6x longer than pronotum and 8x longer than the minimum width, uniform in thickness throughout most of the length except near the posterior fifth as that is slightly wider. Mesothorax armoured along the lateral margin with eleven small spine-like nodes, situated throughout the central ⅔ (Fig. 3F). Mesonotum surface smooth and unadorned. Metanotum circa ¾ as long as mesonotum, slightly less than 4x longer than wide. Metathorax lateral margin with a singular node on each side (in the holotype on one side the node is on the anterior half, and on the other side the node is on the posterior half, they are not aligned). Meso- and metasternum simple, only the longitudinal carina of the sutures are present.

Abdomen. – Abdomen (excluding the extremely long subgenital plate) slightly longer than head and thorax lengths combined. Median segment slightly trapezoidal with the anterior end narrower; slightly less than ¼ the length of the metathorax. Abdominal segments II and III of uniform lengths and widths; segment IV bulging slightly laterally; segments V and VI similar in length and width to segments II and III; VII slightly shorter than previous segments, narrower on the anterior, slightly widening towards the posterior; segments VIII, IX, and X narrower and shorter than all other segments; terminal segment ending in a bluntly rounded point. Sternites II–VII simple, smooth, only marked with a shallow longitudinal carina along the lateral margin. Praeopercular organ only noticeable as a small median protuberance, not prominent. Tergum VIII slightly longer than wide, circa ¾ as long as VII, IX also slightly longer than wide with parallel margins. Anal segment (= tergum X) with the lateral margins slightly diverging to the widest point near the midlength, and then converging to a broadly rounded apex (Fig. 4A). Cerci conical and simple, with few short setae across the surface; short, not reaching the apex of the anal segment (Fig. 4A). Gonapophysis VIII short and obstructed from view by the anal segment (Fig. 4). Subgenital plate long, projecting beyond the apex of the abdomen by circa 1.5x the combined length of abdominal terga VIII-X; margins nearly parallel; portion below the terminal three abdominal segments a similar width to the segments, then as the subgenital plate projects beyond the segments it narrows slightly to the parallel sides (Fig. 4C). When viewed laterally, the depth of the subgenital plate is similar to the height of the terminal abdominal segments above it (Fig. 4B). The apex of the subgenital plate is broadly rounded (Fig. 4A).

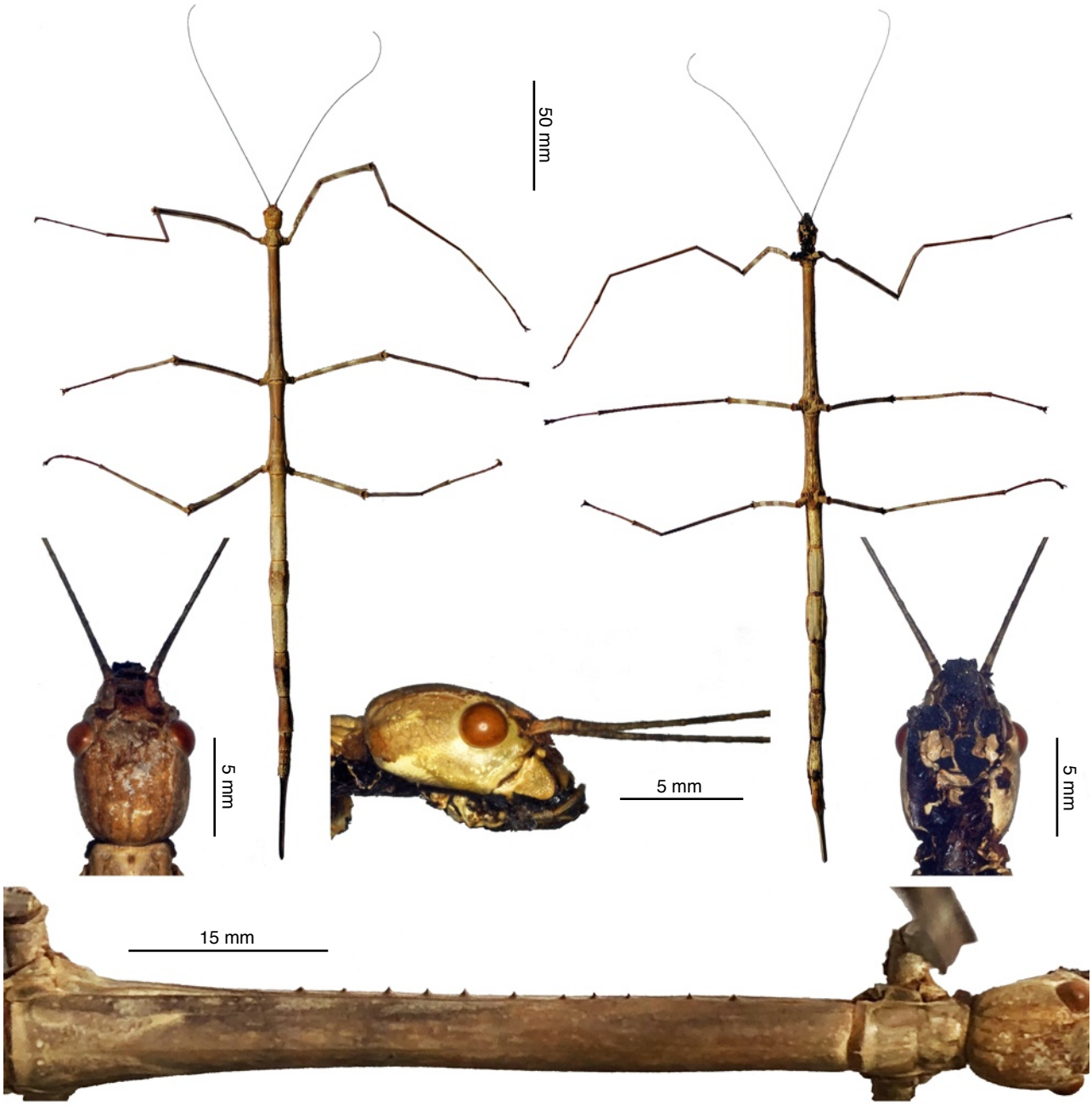

Fig. **3**. Holotype female *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. (KSP). **A**. Dorsal habitus. **B**. Ventral habitus. **C**. Head, dorsal. **D**. Head, lateral. **E**. Head, ventral. **F**. Base of head, pronotum and mesothorax; dorsolateral view.

Legs. – All long and thin, profemora the longest at 76.0 mm long (slightly longer than the pronotum and mesonotum lengths combined); the mesofemora is notable shorter at only 58.0 mm, and the metafemora is moderate in length at 66.0 mm long. All carinae of the femora are armed throughout their lengths by finely tipped serrate teeth pointed distally; number of teeth ranges from 15 to 20 per carina. The teeth on the profemora (Fig. 5A) are slightly smaller than those found on the meso- (Fig. 5B) and metafemora (Fig. 5C). The serration on the tibial carinae is smaller than those found on the femoral carinae, but more numerous (ranging 25 to 32 fine teeth per carina). The two distal-most teeth of the exterior ventral carinae of meso- and metafemora are notably enlarged, notably thicker and larger than the teeth found across the rest of the carinae. The profemora is also armed with larger teeth on the distal end of the femora, but there is only one larger tooth per side, and these are smaller than the distal teeth found on the meso- and metafemora. The first tarsomere on the front leg is slightly longer than the remaining tarsomeres, exceptionally long and thin; simple, lacking ornamentation. The tarsus of the middle and hind legs are similar; where the first tarsomeres of each are slightly shorter than their following tarsomeres combined lengths on their respective legs and the first tarsomeres of each are marked with very slight serration, none prominent.

Measurements of holotype female (mm)
Body (incl. subgenital plate) 297.0,
Subgenital plate length 35.0,
Median segment 9.0,
Pronotum 9.0,
Mesonotum 64.0,
Metanotum 44.0,
Profemora 76.0,
Mesofemora 58.0,
Metafemora 66.0,
Protibiae 102.0,
Mesotibiae 67.0,
Metatibiae 83.0,
Head 13.5,
Antennae 100.0.

Discussion. – The newly described *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. from Biak Island represents a notable eastward range extension for the genus and constitutes the first confirmed record of *Nesiophasma* outside of Wallacea (Fig. 2). This disjunct distribution raises important biogeographical questions,

Fig. **4**. Holotype female *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. (KSP). **A**. Terminalia, dorsal. **B**. Terminalia, lateral. **C**. Terminalia, ventral. (Scale bar associated with all images).

Fig. 5. Holotype female *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. (KSP). **A**. Profemora. **B**. Mesofemora. **C**. Metafemora. Dorsal surfaces presented.

particularly regarding whether the presence of this species on Biak reflects a rare long-distance dispersal event, a relictual lineage, or simply a result of limited sampling across intervening islands. Despite their remarkable size—*Nesiophasma* species rank among the longest insects globally (Hennemann & Conle, 2008)—many have only been formally described in recent years, underscoring how poorly known the megaphasmid fauna of Wallacea and adjacent regions remains (Hennemann, 2021; Hennemann et al., 2023; Hennemann et al., 2025). It is plausible that additional, as-yet-discovered *Nesiophasma* species exist on other islands between Wallacea and New Guinea, or even on the Papuan mainland. For now, however, *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. represents the easternmost occurrence of the genus. Based on the impressive size of *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**., (297.0 mm) it is very likely that this is the longest insect species on Biak, and possibly the longest insect species from West Papua (Hennemann & Conle, 2008). Based upon the review of the world's longest stick insect species presented in Hennemann and Conle (2008), *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. with a body length of 297.0 mm places it among the longest known *Nesiophasma* species (only *Nesiophasma giganteum* has a slightly longer body length as females range from 251.0 to 301.0 mm long (Hennemann, 2021)) and lands it in the top ten longest insect species in the world.
Future surveys on Biak and surrounding islands will be essential to locate the male of *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**., which remains unknown, and to determine whether other *Nesiophasma* species occur east of Weber's and Lydekker's lines of faunal balance or if *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. is a geographically isolated outlier within the genus (Fig. 2).

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Résumé

Daawia, Warikar E.L., Yando H., Suhartawan B., Foley E.M. & Cumming R.T., 2025. – *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**., un nouveau phasme géant de l'île de Biak, Indonésie (Insecta : Phasmatodea). *Faunitaxys*, 13(44) : 1 – 8.

La nouvelle espèce de phasme *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. est décrite de l'île de Biak, province de Papouasie, en Indonésie. Cette découverte représente la première occurrence connue du genre à l'est des lignes d'équilibre faunique de Weber et de Lydekker, étendant ainsi l'aire de répartition connue du genre *Nesiophasma* à la région biogéographique papoue. La nouvelle espèce est diagnostiquée sur la base de sa morphologie externe, avec des illustrations détaillées et une clé de classification des congénères. Malgré la taille souvent importante des espèces de *Nesiophasma*, elles restent peu fréquentes sur le terrain, probablement en raison d'un comportement/camouflage cryptique et d'un sous-échantillonnage dans leur aire de répartition. Cette nouvelle observation contribue aux preuves croissantes d'une diversité méconnue des phasmes dans l'archipel indo-australien et souligne la nécessité de poursuivre l'exploration entomologique des îles papoues au large.

Mots-clés. – Phasmatodea, Phasmida, Platycraninae, Stephanacridini, *Nesiophasma*, taxonomie, description, nouvelle espèce, clé, Wallacea, Indonésie.

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Illustration de la couverture :
Holotype female *Nesiophasma richi* **sp**. **nov**. in situ on Biak Island in July 2007.

Crédits:

Daawia (*Indonesia*): Fig. 1 & couverture
Evelyn Marie Foley (*USA*) : Fig. 2
Rob de Vos (*Netherlands*): Fig. 3, 4, 5

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